

Inspection of a good school: Lowton St Mary's CofE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Newton Road, Lowton, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 1EW

Inspection dates:

29–30 October 2019

Outcome

Lowton St Mary's CofE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy being at school. They clearly love learning. This is mostly due to the unique way in which teachers guide pupils to support each other's education. The school's vision of 'Love of learning, standing tall, make a difference' focuses on developing well-rounded pupils who are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Leaders feel that 'the sky is the limit' for pupils at St Mary's. They have high expectations of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils behave well. Staff act as role models and show genuine interest in pupils' views. The relationships pupils have with their peers and with staff are excellent. Pupils say that staff quickly sort out any poor behaviour. As such, instances of bullying are rare. There are no disruptions to lessons. Staff and pupils are free to focus on developing pupils' learning.

Pupils feel safe at school because of the way in which they are cared for.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are ambitious for pupils' achievement. At the end of each key stage in 2019, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was at least as good as that of other pupils nationally. At the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading and writing improved markedly from the previous year. Pupils' work shows that disadvantaged pupils follow the same high curriculum expectations as other pupils. These pupils also achieve well.

Leaders have developed a culture at the school that includes everyone. For example, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works well with teachers, parents and carers to identify pupils' needs in order to help them to learn. As a result, staff have become adept in removing barriers to learning for all pupils.

Leaders prioritise reading from the start of the early years. Classrooms are set up well to promote the development of pupils' early language skills. Adults make sure that children have lots of opportunities to practise their basic sounds and letters. Teachers accurately match the books that children read to the sounds that they learn. This continues throughout key stage 1. Typically, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Pupils who find their reading difficult are supported well to read fluently and expressively by the end of key stage 1. By the time they reach Year 6, pupils read more complex books with ease.

In mathematics, teachers plan lessons that build well on prior knowledge. In the early years, adults question children skilfully so that they can explain their thinking. As they move through the school, pupils are encouraged to question and challenge each other's answers. This is very successful in developing pupils' reasoning skills. Although mistakes are seen as an opportunity to deepen pupils' understanding, teachers do not consistently pick up on pupils' misconceptions. Some Year 6 pupils I spoke with said that they would like to know more often where they are going wrong. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour in lessons help them to learn effectively.

In recent years, leaders have developed the school's curriculum well. Teachers match their curriculum planning to the content of the national curriculum. They link pupils' learning between subjects well. This means that pupils revisit their prior learning in different ways so that they know and remember more. However, in some subjects, subject leaders have not paid enough attention to the aims of the national curriculum in their plans, for example when understanding cause and consequence in history. Senior leaders know this and are working to make the school's curriculum even better.

Governors have a clear vision to develop pupils' personal development. There are a wide range of trips and visits for pupils to develop their appreciation of music and art. Pupils take part in a variety of clubs, such as debating, gymnastics and gardening. Leaders and governors also prioritise effective support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff and governors have received appropriate training for safeguarding. As a result, all adults know and are watchful for the signs of abuse or neglect. Governors make sure that appropriate checks are carried out on new members of staff. Leaders continually review their practice to make sure that pupils are kept safe from harm.

When concerns are raised, staff are swift to respond. Leaders engage with other professionals to provide early help for pupils and their families where necessary. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The mathematics curriculum has been implemented well. The opportunities that pupils have to discuss and challenge each other's learning are a unique characteristic of the school. As a result of their debates about their learning, pupils' reasoning skills develop well. However, teachers miss some key opportunities to address pupils' misconceptions, particularly around place value. Leaders should ensure that staff know when to intervene in discussions to correct misconceptions and reinforce the curricular intent.
- Senior leaders have put in place a well-thought-out curriculum. Training has been central to raising the awareness of staff when teaching subjects such as history and geography. Although subjects leaders have defined the content of the national curriculum well for each year, they have not provided enough detail about the aims of the national curriculum. As such, pupils' conceptual understanding is not as strong as it could otherwise be, for example in understanding ways of working scientifically. Leaders should ensure that these aims are planned for in more detail when determining the goals that they want pupils to achieve in each topic so that pupils know and understand these subjects in more depth.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 26–27 November 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	106486
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10058027
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sophie Gardiner
Headteacher	Mr David Sherriff
Website	lowtonstmaryscephprimary.net
Date of previous inspection	26–27 November 2014

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed at the school.
- Lowton St Mary's is a school with a religious character. The school's last section 48 inspection for schools with a religious character took place in May 2015.

Information about this inspection

- During this inspection, I met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo and subject leaders.
- I spoke with representatives from Wigan local authority and the school's external improvement adviser.
- I met with groups of pupils from across the school, both formally and informally, to ask them about safeguarding. I also met with the headteacher, governors and teachers to discuss safeguarding. I reviewed documentation which included the school's safeguarding policy, the register of the checks carried out on new employees and safeguarding records.
- I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and discussed behaviour and bullying with

pupils, teachers and senior leaders.

- I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 26 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey. I also took account of the 98 responses to the pupil survey and the six responses to the staff survey.
- I considered reading, mathematics and history as part of this inspection. For these subjects, I spoke with the headteacher, met with curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils, undertook an analysis of pupils' work and visited lessons. I heard pupils read. I also spoke to key stage 2 pupils about their work across the curriculum.

Inspection team

Steve Bentham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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